DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 136 380 EA 009 295

AUTHOR McCann, Maurice
TITLE The Truman Administration and Federal Aid to Education.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 42p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, N.Y., April 4-8, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Finance; *Educational History; *Educational Legislation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Federal Aid; Federal Government; *Federal Legislation; Federal State Relationship; Government Role; Higher Education; Nonpublic School Aid
IDENTIFIERS *Congress; *Truman (Harry S)

ABSTRACT

During the Truman administration, the concept of federal aid to education became clearly defined and gained considerable political support. President Truman supported general aid for education as a policy consistent with the administration's overall objectives in domestic programs, but he avoided leadership because of the controversies surrounding it. Those controversies centered around issues such as federal aid to nonpublic schools and the form that such aid should take (Funds for school construction? Equalization funds for impacted areas? Across-the-board grants?). Leadership for the federal aid movement therefore shifted to Congress, and specifically to Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio. Although the movement for general aid to education failed to obtain legislative sanction, it did leave behind a widespread conviction that a need existed for substantial federal aid to education in some form and stimulated new approaches to this objective. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED136380

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

DR. MAURICE McCANN

The Truman Administration and Federal Aid to Education

During the Truman Administration the concept of federal aid to education became clearly defined and gained considerable political support. This support was more the result of general public and Congressional interest in education than of political pressures by organized interest groups. President Truman supported general aid for education as a policy consistent with the administration's overall objectives in domestic programs, but avoided leadership because of the political and personal controversies surrounding it. Leadership for the federal aid movement was therefore transferred to interested Congressional leaders, most notably, Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio. Although the movement for general aid to education failed to obtain legislative sanction, it did leave behind a widespread conviction that a need for substantial federal aid to education in some form existed and stimulated new approaches to this objective.

A Summary of Educational Successes During the Truman Years

Despite Congressional failure to legislate a general aid to education program, a number of "special group"

EA 009 295

education bills were enacted into law during Truman's tenure in office. Upon succession to the Presidency, Truman immediately reaffirmed the Roosevelt Administration's commitment to a liberal postwar domestic policy which was expected to involve expanded government welfare programs. Truman also aligned his administration to the previous caution used by the Roosevelt Administration concerning endorsements of a general policy toward aid to education. Although Roosevelt had failed to actively support federal aid to education during the Depression era, he did provide relief from the economic distress the nation was experiencing by requesting numerous types of federal assistance which indirectly aided the financial plight of the public schools. During the 1930s, the educational systems of the United States declined sharply in their ability to continue normal operations. To provide relief from the economic distress the nation was experiencing, President Roosevelt requested a variety of educational activities designed primarily to reduce the detrimental impact of the depression upon lower- and middle-class Americans. Through increase and improvement of local school facilities, and through instruction of youth in institutions which were federally administered in the states, the government became actively involved in the educational affairs of the nation. During the Great Depression, massive amounts of federal dollars were poured into every conceivable phase

of American education, including school building construction, school lunches, teacher salaries, textbooks, student jobs, and vocational work. General federal aid for educational purposes would have been entirely consistent with "New Deal" domestic legislation, but with the exception of indirect aid to the schools, such as the National Youth Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Projects Administration, and the Public Works Administration, general federal aid was not requested except in Roosevelt's last budget message.

Executive hesitation on the issue of federal aid to education was reversed due to a series of domestic occurrences following the Second World War. The War was a major turning point in the basic structure of American society and caused profound social, economic, and political changes that had a definite effect on American education in the post-war years. Greater demands were placed upon the nation's education systems and, more than ever before, Americans expected the schools to cope with the rapid social and technological transformations which were occurring. Yet the schools were becoming less capable of adjusting to the changes. Mounting enrollments caused by a post-war "baby-boom" made the schools even less competent in providing a reasonably adequate education for those of school age. Furthermore, the Depression and World War II had resulted in severe classroom and teacher shortages. Local school

districts fell far behind in their ability to keep pace with the needs for quality education. These conditions caused many citizens, especially educators, to look to the federal government for support in meeting the growing crises in the schools. In response to these crises, federal aid to education emerged, in the post-war years, as a significant national domestic issue.

President Truman, however, insisted on the continuation of Roosevelt's program of indirect financial assistance to education. In his 1945 Reconversion Message to Congress, Truman urged Congressional enactment of a universal military-educational training program for all male citizens between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one, the continuation of public works projects, and the extension of educational aid to areas impacted by war-related activities. Truman believed that a period of universal military training would raise the physical standards of the nation's manpower, improve its literacy rates, and develop in the young men the ideals of responsible American citizenship. The public works program would alleviate expected high unemployment statistics and allow resumption of construction which had been halted due to war-related priorities.

The failure of the President to formulate a detailed education program can be partially attributed to respect for the precedent set by the Roosevelt Administration

and to Truman's involvement in more pressing domestic and international affairs. The President also gave every indication that he was personally uninterested in the concept of general aid to education. Truman had received only twelve years of formal schooling, yet considered himself to be a superbly self-educated man. In both Truman's Memoirs and Merle Miller's Plain Speaking, the President stated that formal schooling was not necessary to attain knowledge.

> The thing I found out from reading was that there is damn little information in most school books that was worth a damn. If you wanted to find out why France was against England during the Revolution and the why and wherefore of Jefferson's being able to buy Louisiana, you had to go and look it up for yourself. It didn't matter how good your teachers were. They never taught you things like that.[1]

Truman's personal educational background and his immense respect for the self-made man strengthened his belief that equipment, construction and, monetary aid had little to do with the effectiveness of an educational system. Taking his life as a model, Truman rationalized that students desiring knowledge could learn under almost any educational condition. The "desire to learn" was much more important than the physical facilities of the schools. Truman also criticized the educators for teaching the wrong subjects. The President believed that public schools were impractical

---

[1]Merle Miller, Plain Speaking (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1973), p. 64.

in not teaching high school students the basics of grammar or spelling. The President held a strong belief, however, that an individual's motivation could overcome all physical and instructional handicaps. In fact, the President often stated, in private, that a self-made scholar was better educated than the professors from Harvard.

It is uncertain whether Congress agreed with President Truman's private opinions in regard to education, but Congress was favorably inclined to the educational recommendations in Truman's 1945 reconversion message. In the following session, 1946, Congress initiated the funding of a new secondary vocational education program, passed two fellowship programs advocated by the President, and increased appropriations for impacted areas receiving aid under the Lanham Act of 1940. The George-Barden Act of 1946 appropriated 30,350,000 dollars for the purpose of expanding the program of federal aid for vocational education. The administration's fellowship program was initiated by the Fulbright Act which provided for the transfer and exchange of American scholars with foreign countries. The Atomic Energy Act established a commission which continued the federal scholarship program by providing scholarships and fellowships to deserving scholars in scientific and technical fields.

The Lanham Act of 1940, which awarded financial assistance during the war years to school systems in

impacted military areas, was to terminate on June 30, 1946. The Lanham Act of 1946, similar to subsequent acts passed over the next four years, was merely to continue, on a somewhat enlarged scale, this particular federal aid program during the upcoming fiscal year.

The Truman Administration continued its subdued position on an education program following its defeat in the Congressional elections of 1946. Domestic affairs were relatively played down in the annual budget message of 1947, and the President simply pointed out that the federal government had responsibilities for the general improvement of educational opportunities in the country. The main consideration of Congress during this time centered upon passage of a general aid to education bill. The Senate and the House did find time, however, to pass legislation establishing a National Science Foundation, which was subsequently vetoed by President Truman. The President supported the concept of a National Science Foundation, but did not approve of certain provisions in this particular bill which vested part-time officials with full administrative and political responsibilities, the virtual nullification of Presidential appointment power, and the interference with Presidential authority to coordinate and correlate governmental programs. During the subsequent session, a National Science Foundation bill aligned to Presidential sympathies received immediate

consideration and passage in the Senate. In the House, however, three years elapsed before a National Science Foundation bill received consideration and passage.

Throughout his Presidency, Truman had publicly advocated that America should achieve the goal of equal educational opportunity, but his personal opinions, as mentioned previously, had not concurred. By 1948, however, Truman had changed his private opinion concerning federal aid to education. The consideration of general aid to education in the Senate and the arguments presented by those advocating such a policy must have had a powerful influence on Truman's personal beliefs in regard to federal financing of public schools. Alternating from his 1946 position that school facilities were not necessary for a student to receive a good education, the President, in 1948, began supporting the federal aid issue. In personal reply to H. Leroy Whitney of New York, the President firmly stressed the necessity of federal financial assistance to public schools in order that teachers could receive decent pay and children could have better physical facilities. The President stated that if the federal government could spend a few meager dollars on constructive education, perhaps America would never again spend 500,000,000,000 dollars on a destructive world war.

Truman solidified his personal views in the 1948 Economic Report to Congress in which he challenged the

Republican controlled Eightieth Congress to enact federal aid to elementary and secondary education immediately and to consider a comprehensive program of federal aid to education, which he implied should include aid for school construction and higher education. Although continuing to emphasize the need for a universal military-education training system, the President included in the 1948 budget, for the first time, an item of 300,000,000 dollars to begin grants to the states for elementary and secondary education.

The 1948 elections gave the Democratic Party control of both Houses of Congress and Truman anticipated rapid passage of a series of domestic social welfare reforms including federal aid to education. Throughout 1947 and 1948, the President had experienced frustration with the Eightieth Congress's consistent record of disregarding major administrative domestic programs, including federal aid to education. Democrats of the Eighty-first Congress, however, proved to be as "do-nothing" as the Republicans of the Eightieth Congress. A general aid to education bill passed the Senate, but a series of long debates in the House, concerning the religious question of aid to parochial schools, condemned the bill to remain in the House Committee on Education and Labor.

The Eighty-first Congress did enact legislation to permanently aid schools in areas impacted by military installations. Initiative for consideration of this legislation occurred with the beginning of the Korean War. In

late June of 1950, hostilities erupted in Korea and overnight the United States was deeply committed to the United Nations' police action to repel the Communist invasion. Impacted aid legislation was, at that time, being considered by Congress. Conceived in peacetime as a long-term adjustment of intergovernmental relations in which the major problems were part of the aftermath of World War II, the impact aid proposals acquired a new urgency during the Korean conflict as a means to help the public schools accommodate the quick and massive new population moves that accompanied the rapid expansion of military forces and armaments production.

In 1950 the Eighty-first Congress considered and passed a National Science Foundation bill similar to that recommended by the President in 1947. Congress also passed and the President signed a 300,000,000 dollar college housing program which would allow long-term, low-interest loans to educational instutions for construction of dormitories and other revenue-producing housing facilities.

Despite the Eighty-first Congress's rejection of education legislation supported by the Truman Administration, the President made no significant change in his position on general aid to education during his final two years in office. The outbreak of the Korean War likewise brought no change in the administration's position on

general aid although Congress became increasingly dominated by sentiment advocating decreased funding for domestic social programs. The only modification made in the administration's program for education after 1950 was to reintroduce in 1952 the general scholarship bill it had withdrawn after the outbreak of the Korean War. Budgetary limitations continued, after 1950 as before, to rule out administrative support for construction aid as a substitute for general aid for current expenses. With little influence in a Congress which had become completely deadlocked on general aid, the administration's record on education legislation after 1950 was almost completely negative. Aside from the passage of a "G. I. Bill" for veterans of the Korean War, the only important development in this period was that supporters of aid to education in Congress kept the issue alive and began to explore new and less controversial approaches to the problem.

General Aid to Education as a Political Issue

The concept of federal aid to education, or subsidization of state and local education systems, arose almost from the beginning of public education in the United States. Despite almost universal consensus in support of state and local taxation to finance public schools in the states, substantial federal aid to education was more controversial than other similar federal social welfare programs. The

difficulty in reaching a national consensus was compounded by the fact that major educational organizations could not agree on a common approach to federal legislation and consequently worked at cross purposes. The strong tradition of state and local rather than federal responsibility for education combined with the belief that federal aid to education would be construed as unconstitutional, prevented any education proposal from receiving serious political consideration until World War II. The financial burden of supporting public education during the economic depression of the 1930s and the difficulty in obtaining trained teachers during World War II convinced both citizen and legislator that the traditional system could no longer be maintained without substantial federal support. Subsequently, the national disadvantage of increasing illiteracy rates and other scholastic inadequacies was intensified by unemployment during the depression and manpower needs of the armed forces and industry during the Second World War.

A precedent for federal aid to education was set by the New Deal public works programs of the 1930s. During World War II, legislators became more favorably attached to the concept of a permanent federal aid to education issue. Although the idea of general aid to education had been considered on several occasions in Congress in the late 1930s and early 1940s, it was not until the Truman Administration that both Houses of Congress gave serious attention to this

issue. For the first time, an effort was also made to work out the technical details of such a program and devise acceptable compromises on major controversial issues.

President Truman deplored the centralized control of education by the federal government and pointed to its dangers, but vigorously asserted that the federal government must participate in support of education in the states in order to equalize educational opportunity among American youth. Prevailing control of education must remain at local and state levels, but the federal government should grant financial aid so that states could achieve a minimum level of quality education. This financial assistance would be distributed according to wealth, ability to tax, and financial needs of the certain states requesting aid.

With executive policy stated as such, the problem then became one of achieving the program in practice by persuading Congress to pass a federal aid bill. Success seemed within sight when the Taft-Thomas bill passed the Senate in 1948 and 1949. Unfortunately, however, this bill was subsequently defeated in the House of Representatives amid wide public clamor over the religious issue. Especially bitter were the feelings expressed by anti-parochial aid spokesmen, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and Representative Graham Barden, and pro-parochial aid spokesman, Francis Cardinal Spellman.

The reason Congress was unable to enact a general federal aid to education bill involved a multiplicity of complex problems. Initiated primarily as a financial donation by the federal government to the operating expenses of elementary and secondary education on a national and permanent basis, the federal aid program soon raised serious and controversial federal-state, church-state, and race-related questions. Additional problems occurred in defining a system to provide funds to education, notably in interpreting what the educational needs were, and devising a basis for distributing federal funds in accordance with a state's financial needs. There were also problems in determining an appropriate scope and level of aid as well as the political problem of overcoming resistance to the launching of a sizable federal program in a new field of social welfare.

Some of the problems which the panacea of general aid was expected to cure were hard to accurately define and changed continually. Increasing rates of illiteracy, usually pointed to as the most obvious education problem in the country during the 1940s, were generally attributed to low incomes within individual school districts which made it impossible to provide adequate school facilities and teachers' salaries. In the south, inadequate income was generally held responsible for the low educational levels in that area. Nationally, specific needs appeared

more important than equalization aid for low income states. Thus, during the Depression and World War II, inadequate teachers' salaries loomed as perhaps the most important educational problem and in the late 1940s and early 1950s, school building construction appeared to be the major need of the country's educational systems.

By 1952 three distinct types of federal aid bills had been introduced into Congress. The Senate-based Taft-Thomas bill provided for 300,000,000 dollars a year to enable states to advance their elementary and secondary schools to a federally-set minimum expenditure of about fifty-five dollars per pupil. The formula would grant every state at least five dollars per child of school age, and some states would receive as much as twenty-five dollars per child, depending upon need. The equalization aid provisions were generally accepted by Congressional legislators, but two other provisions were especially controversial. One provision required that states maintaining segregated schools must allocate a just and equitable proportion of federal funds to schools of the minority race within that particular state. The other provision would allow states to use federal funds for any purpose of current school expenditures (not buildings, interest, debt, or health services) for which the state used its own funds. The Taft-Thomas bill, which became the basis for the Truman Administration's federal aid to education program, was

passed by the Senate in 1948 and 1949, but, due to the controversial religious issue, was unable to receive a favorable vote in the House Committee on Education and Labor.

A second type of bill was represented by the Barden bill which was somewhat similar in financial amount to the Taft-Thomas bill, but specifically denied the use of federal funds for nonpublic schools. In addition, the Barden bill did not legislate equal distribution of federal funds to segregated Negro schools in southern states.

The third example of education legislation was represented by the Murray-McMahon bill in the Senate and the Fogarty bill in the House. Both bills had certain provisions directly opposite to those of the Barden bill. These provisions required that a percentage of federal funds be used for auxiliary services to nonpublic as well as to public schools. The obvious intent was to make sure that parochial school children received necessary benefits to assure their equal educational opportunity.

Depending on its technical details, general aid could have been directed to a variety of objectives. The Truman Administration supported the Taft-Thomas bill which did grant federal aid to rural schools, but offered little to salve the wounds of decaying urban institutions. Urban areas were expected to raise sufficient funds for current expenses and would be granted certain expenditures for

special needs arising from sudden unemployment or rapid population growth. In the Truman period, therefore, general aid was something of a misnomer since it by no means meant federal aid for all important education needs. It was generaly only in that federal aid would become part of the general operating fund of state educational agencies and it would be provided on a national basis, although in actual practice most of the aid would go to the southern states.

The most pressing administrative problem presented by federal aid to education was the effectiveness of the state agencies which it presupposed. In most states, local school districts were essentially autonomous and their supervision or control by state authorities was nominal. On the other hand, direct federal aid to individual school districts on an equalization basis would eliminate the role of the states and in practice place most of the financial burden for support of education on the federal government. Channeling aid through state educational agencies raised questions about the extent to which federal safeguards or supervision of these agencies was needed to assure that the objectives of federal aid would be achieved.

General aid might have been less controversial in the Truman period had the way for it been prepared by placing the veterans' education program (G. I. Bill of 1944) under the control of state educational agencies. If state

educational agencies had successfully administered such a large program, including aid for nonpublic institutions, Congress, and particularly the House of Representatives, might have been more willing to launch general aid to education through them. The veterans' program was administered directly by the federal government, however, primarily because the veterans' organizations wished to separate it from civilian programs and thereby obtain preferential treatment.

Federal Aid and the United States Senate

During his initial years in office, President Truman was unable to develop a specific federal aid to education program. The President was not intentionally neglecting his duties as the executive leader; instead, preoccupation with military and foreign affairs, the uncertainty of domestic economic developments, and the traditional weaknesses of the educational bureaucracy of the federal government forced President Truman to align his administration to the previous caution used by Franklin Roosevelt concerning endorsement of a general aid to education program.

Consequently, leadership of the movement for general aid to education was seized by Senator Robert A. Taft, Republican of Ohio, and leader of the conservative faction in the Senate. Sharing expectations that large-scale federal aid to education in some form was inevitable

and also believing that some type of aid was desirable, Senator Taft proceeded to work out the technical details of a general aid program which would ensure state and local control of education. The most important contribution of the Taft bill was the concept of a minimum foundation expenditure per pupil in all school districts in the country. This provision was designed to ensure that the southern states would raise the educational levels of Negro schools to a national minimum. The Taft bill also formed a compromise on the question of aid for nonpublic schools, and made concession to the demands of northern states for aid by supplementing the minimal foundation grant with a flat grant to all states regardless of need.

President Truman did not agree with Taft's legislative proposal for general aid to education and instead recommended a broad concept of compulsory military training of one year for all young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one. Provisions would be made within the armed services to help trainees improve their physical and mental status. A large part of the training was to be used in the development of skills which would be useful in future civilian life. Opposition to Truman's universal military training program occurred immediately from a variety of public interest groups, and the President, in response to public pressures, capitulated by withdrawing his recommendations.

The lack of public interest in an administration-backed military training bill coupled with the Democratic defeat in the Congressional elections of 1946 increased Senator Taft's prestige as leader in the movement for a general aid to education bill. At this same time, however, while Senator Taft's prestige and presidential prospects were increasing, the previously anticipated need for a large federal expenditure in the postwar period did not materialize. The Truman Administration's social welfare program, as enunciated in this twenty-one point reconversion program of 1945, was being curtailed because of national sentiment to economize federal expenditures as a means to combat inflation. By 1947 little possibility existed for the passage of a broad program of federal aid for education in urban areas and for nonpublic schools. An inflation-minded Congress did not desire the massive federal aid expenditures advocated by Truman's military-education training or the American Federation of Labor's 1,000,000,000 dollar general aid to education bill.

Nevertheless, public pressure continued for federal action to remedy some of the more serious educational problems. The Taft bill, which provided financial aid for the neediest areas, gained immediate support. The bill appealed to both Senate liberals and conservatives as a measure which would grant limited federal aid to education as a compromise to ward off more expensive programs, yet maintain necessary

state and local control of education. With the possibility of larger expenditures eliminated by rampant domestic inflation, Truman and his administration had no real alternative to the Taft bill and differed with it only on minor details. By 1948 Truman had endorsed the Taft bill in principle by including in his budget for that year the appropriation of 300,000,000 dollars for general federal aid to education. Truman did limit his endorsement, however, and subsequently requested aid for school construction and scholarship aid for higher education, two types of aid which would benefit northern urban areas and nonpublic schools to a greater extent than the Taft bill.

As a limited measure aiding chiefly the southern states and not fully satisfactory to representatives of northern urban areas or nonpublic schools, the Taft bill passed the Senate in 1948. This Senate approval was interpreted by Truman as indicative of a substantial national consensus behind the Taft legislation. Truman, in response to what he believed was public opinion, incorporated provisions of the Taft bill into his program of "Fair Deal" social reform. The Senate passage of the Taft bill failed to reflect the full extent of opposition to such a measure. The Senate was far more liberal than the House on progressive issues such as aid to education. This was true because the most controversial issues involved in general aid at this time, discrimination

against urban areas and aid for nonpublic schools, did not affect members of the Senate nearly as much as members of the House of Representatives.

The most significant aspect of the Senate passage of the Taft bill in 1948 and 1949 was that a majority of southern Democrats and Republicans voted for the bill. These two groups had historically opposed any social welfare measure, in particular federal aid legislation for public schools. Southern Democrats placed their support behind the Taft measure because they felt it was a last chance to obtain federal aid for education on terms that would bolster rather than undermine racial segregation. The 1947 Civil Rights Commission Report had pressured the administration into support of civil rights legislation and it was only a matter of time until these policies would be law. In an attempt to gain what aid they could, and perhaps set a precedent for future federal aid to education legislation, southern Democrats threw their support behind a bill which would temporarily perpetuate segregation.

Northern Republicans in the Senate supported the Taft bill for a variety of reasons. Taft, as leader of the Republican part, had a large and cohesive following in the Senate and many northern Republicans supported the measure as a personal favor to the Ohio Senator. Inflation-minded Republicans viewed federal aid to education as inevitable and supported the Taft bill because it would halt

the more expensive school aid bills pending in Congress while demonstrating a genuine Republican concern for national social welfare programs.

The forlorn prospects of House passage of a general school aid bill forced the Senate to initiate a new policy that might be acceptable to both Houses of Congress. Senator Hubert Humphrey of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare proposed aid for school construction as a form of aid to education for which there was a serious need and which could avoid the controversy surrounding general aid along lines of the Taft bill. Senator Humphrey was the first important northern liberal to assume a position of leadership in the movement for federal aid to education and it was significant that he worked for a long-range program of aid for school construction as an immediate alternative to general school aid. Humphrey's proposals were subsequently defeated, however, when brought to a floor vote and the prospects for general aid in the Senate during the Truman Administration collapsed.

One of the reasons that the Humphrey bill failed was Senator Taft's opposition to it. Although prepared to make concessions on general aid, Taft was not prepared to abandon it in favor of aid for school construction. Taft opposed aid for school construction on grounds that it was too expensive and would not deal with the most important needs of education. In taking this position he

remained true to his conservative approach on aid to education. Taft's rejection of the school construction aid program influenced the vote of many conservative senators, both northern Republicans and southern Democrats, who had supported his bill in 1948 and 1949.

Defeat of Federal Aid to Education in the House of Representatives

The overwhelming consensus in favor of general aid to education which developed in the Senate was not achieved in the House of Representatives. The differing constituencies of the two chambers and the failure of the Committee on Education and Labor to maintain a strong leadership hindered House acceptance of educational legislation. The impasse on federal aid in the House can be attributed as much to obstructionism by the leadership of the House Committee on Education and Labor in the Eightieth and Eighty-first Congresses as to the conflict over aid to nonpublic schools.

Educational problems which had been solved or compromised in the Senate initiated new difficulties in the House of Representatives. The statewide constituencies of Senators made them more responsive to the interests of state educational authorities and their major interest group, the National Education Association, than were members of the House. In Congressional districts, the interests of local school districts far outweighed those of the weak

state educational agencies. Representatives from urban areas were less likely to favor distribution of federal funds by state authorities than direct aid to cities by the federal government. Nonpublic schools in most states were also concentrated ir urban areas and were represented more strongly in Congressional districts than in the Senate. In addition, the House Committee on Education and Labor was more conservative on economic questions than its Senate counterpart because of the greater influence of rural areas and business interests in the lower chamber.

The prospects for general aid legislation were more affected by committee leadership in the House than in the Senate because of a tradition of greater dominance of House committees by their chairman. Although some members of the House committee strongly favored general aid, they were unable to provide leadership in the absence of support from the chairman. During the Truman Administration, the House Committee on Education and Labor was chaired initially by conservative Representative Fred Hartley, and, after a brief interlude in 1949 and early 1950 under the liberal John Lesinski, remained under the conservative leadership of Graham A. Barden. Even Lesinski, a liberal on economic issues, and the representative of a predominantly Catholic urban working-class district in Michigan, did not support the Senate-passed Taft bill. Graham A. Barden, who

succeeded to the chairmanship upon Lesinski's death, had made an effort to cooperate with the Roosevelt and Truman administrations while chairman of the former House Committee on Education from 1943 to 1946. By 1950, however, Barden had become alienated from the Truman Administration and had vowed that all education bills that would come from his committee must include provisions enforcing segregation in southern public schools.

The House committee, in addition, could not agree on compromises in its closed sessions. Thus, unlike the Taft bill in the Senate, the McCowen bill of 1947 came out of the House education subcommittee unchanged from the form in which it was introduced. Similarly, in 1949, no modifications were incorporated in the Barden bill during the deliberations of the Barden subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor. Nevertheless, general aid bills made much greater progress in the House Committee on Education and Labor during the Truman Administration than ever before and came within one vote of being approved by the whole committee in 1945 and 1950. Subcommittees of the House Committee on Education and Labor did approve general aid bills by sizable margins in 1947 and 1949.

Obstacles to House committee approval of a general aid bill included economic conservatism, religious opposition, and dissatisfaction with amounts of aid provided to higher income states. In 1945 such dissatisfaction was

apparently the decisive factor in the rejection of the Ramspect bill by one vote. During the Republican Eightieth Congress, general economic conservatism of the committee chairman and House leadership seemed to be the major obstacles preventing action on the McCowen bill by the full committee. In 1949 and 1950, spectacular religious controversy combined with strong economic conservatism in the committee was the most important reason for rejection of the Taft bill by one vote.

The close divisions within the House committee made it difficult to work on any alternative to the Senate-passed Taft-Thomas bill. Although alternatives were proposed, no serious effort was made during the 1950 session to develop a substitute for the Taft bill after the committee had rejected it. Compromise efforts to provide at least token aid for nonpublic schools on a national basis were hindered by Chairman Barden's hostility to aid for nonpublic schools. Also, although the Senate had passed a school health measure with mandatory benefits for nonpublic school children, a similar measure was stalled in the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce where it was opposed by the doctors' lobby as socialized medicine. The best the House Committee on Education and Labor could do was lay a basis for future consideration of aid for school construction as a substitute for general aid.

Under the pressures of the struggle over general aid, the House Committee on Education and Labor did display initiative in the field of aid for federally impacted areas. In this field, also, the House committee showed a strong desire to escape controversy by developing a concept of clear and undeniable federal responsibility. The impacted areas program can thus be viewed as a reaction against general aid and a return to the Roosevelt Administration's precedent of specialized and categorical federal aid. The impacted aid bills successfully avoided religious controversy and soon provided a vehicle for a steadily increasing volume of federal aid for elementary and secondary schools which in many districts amounted to general aid.

The Truman Administration and Education

Support of general aid to education was not a vital political matter for the Truman Administration. The teachers' lobby was weak and its electoral support was undoubtedly a minor consideration for the administration. The Truman Administration regarded aid to education not so much as a political issue in itself as a part of its general approach to domestic social welfare matters. This conclusion is strengthened by the fact that the administration's position on education was always a generalized one and avoided taking a position on the major controversial issues involved in the question of federal aid to education. Involvement in the controversies associated with aid to

education would probably have cost the administration more political support than it would have gained. The administration therefore supported aid to education in a general way, exerting mild pressure on Congress, but leaving leadership on the matter in the hands of Congress.

The Truman Administration genuinely believed that favorable Congressional action on general aid to education was possible on the basis of the Taft bill. There is no indication, however, that the Truman Administration used its support of general aid chiefly as a means of obtaining action or avoiding unfavorable action by Congress on other matters. Nevertheless, Truman's position on aid to education was consistent with his administration's overall policy of using "Fair Deal" programs as a means of exerting pressure on a Congress determined to defend the social reforms of the New Deal.

Both the Roosevelt and the Truman administrations originally designed aid to education as a part of a series of broad social welfare programs. Both administrations expected that general aid for education would be a part, perhaps a minor part, of federal programs aiding education, such as the veterans' education program, universal military training, school construction, and provision of school health services. These programs were to be administered as much as possible through state education agencies. Had these expectations been fulfilled, aid for the general

operating expenses of the poorest school agencies would have been consistent with other forms of aid also provided through state education authorities. In such a context the controversies traditionally surrounding general aid would presumably have been minimized as they had been under the New Deal programs. Both administrations thought of general aid primarily as a means of aiding southern Negroes and the population of rural areas. The special emergency programs of the New Deal had never adequately remedied the gross educational inadequacies of these areas.

When economic conditions did not develop as anticipated after the end of World War II, the prospects for broad aid to education programs other than the G. I. Bill greatly diminished. The Truman Administration was therefore left in the embarrassing position of having endorsed general aid in principle but being unwilling to actively promote it. A more active role in promoting aid to education was also difficult for the administration because of the historically weak federal role in education and poor relations with the House Committee on Education and Labor. The administration was also handicapped by the failure to place administration of the G. I. program under the Office of Education and state education authorities and thereby strengthen their role as a channel of federal aid.

Instead of the Office of Education, the Truman Administration relied on the Bureau of the Budget for

overall strategy in the field of aid to education, leaving only technical details to the Office of Education. The Office of Education might have been of greater use had the Truman Administration not suspended action on education legislation while universal military training proposals were being discussed during the critical period when Congressional interest in general aid was rising.

Although in many ways imaginative in educational matters, the Bureau of the Budget viewed education primarily in economic and fiscal terms and in the context of the administration's overall legislative program. The Bureau had little contact with the many groups with special interests in the field of education, It was not sufficiently aware of the political ramifications of the issue of general aid. Had the Office of Education been assigned more responsibility, the Truman Administration might have played a more constructive role in this field even if the principal leadership remained in Congress. For example, it seems that much more could have been done to promote contact between the major groups with an interest in general aid during the period when Senator Taft's bill was being elaborated. Although the Office of Education was primarily associated with public education, it was more aware than the Bureau of the Budget of the attitude of nonpublic and private school leaders toward general aid and was prepared to support compromises

more acceptable to them. Confusion and indecision on a domestic education program caused the Truman Administration to miss opportunities in the period 1945 to 1948.

After 1948 the Truman Administration displayed more vigor and initiative in its education proposals but neglected general aid for elementary and secondary schools in favor of aid for higher education. In the area of higher education the administration developed constructive proposals which were deliberately designed to be acceptable to private colleges and universities. Although not enacted because of the outbreak of the Korean War and the subsequent reactivation of the veterans' education program, these scholarship proposals were an important precedent for the National Defense Act of 1958 and subsequent legislation. It is significant that in its scholarship proposals the Truman Administration moved away from the idea that federal aid to education should be administered by the states.

In the field of aid for elementary and secondary schools, after 1948 the Truman Administration again took the position that the Taft bill represented a national consensus. In view of the uncertainties of House action on the Taft bill, this was a presumptuous position. In particular it would seem that once the Taft bill began to falter in the House, the administration might have discreetly encouraged a search for compromises or

alternatives instead of rigidly repeating its demands for general aid legislation. For example, the possibilities of utilizing the impacted areas program as a vehicle for federal aid to education were inadequately appreciated by the Bureau of the Budget. The impacted areas program eventually became the principal model for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the first program approximating general aid for elementary and secondary schools. Had the Truman Administration been flexible, more might have been salvaged from evident Congressional and public concern for educational problems in deprived areas. As it was, the Bureau of the Budget seemed more interested after 1950 in simply creating a record of administrative support for the principle of general aid than in realistic attempts to obtain action from Congress.

The Truman Administration must therefore share with Congress the blame for failure to obtain needed federal aid for education in the postwar period. President Truman himself was evidently not particularly interested personally in aid to education and did little to encourage initiative in this field within his administration. Similarly, the Federal Security Administrator from 1947 to 1953, Oscar W. Ewing, was more interested in the administration's health insurance proposals than in aid to education and himself did little to encourage initiative in the Office of Education or to take education matters directly to the President.

The United States Commissioners of Education during this period, John Studebaker and Earl McGrath, had a genuine interest in obtaining federal aid for education, but their influence was curtailed by administrative disregard.

A Final Synopsis: The Truman Administration and Education

During the Truman Administration, proposals for general federal aid to education, for the first time, won widespread public attention and received lengthy consideration by the administration and Congress. In view of the subsequent history of general aid measures in Congress, however, the events of this period can hardly be regarded as more than the initial stages of a protracted national debate over the most appropriate form of aid. The most prominent form of aid considered during the Truman period--equalization aid to the states--was in effect rejected at that time because of the controversies it aroused. As a result of these developments, for the first time serious doubts arose about the possibility of channeling federal aid to education entirely through state educational agencies. The major educational organizations continued to favor this approach, however, and it was not finally abandoned in favor of more politically acceptable forms of aid until after several more unsuccessful attempts to obtain general aid in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The status of general aid to education as a political issue therefore remained confused and uncertain at the conclusion of the Truman Administration. The chief contribution of the Truman period was to attract sufficient attention to the problem to keep the issue continuously alive and to stimulate a search for new approaches to the problem. The Truman Administration was the first to attempt to develop a comprehensive program of federal aid to education. Perhaps even more important was Senator Taft's support for general aid since he was one of the first national political figures to seek to obtain a national consensus behind general aid for education. The struggle for general aid also emphasized the key role of the new House Committee on Education and Labor in the domestic programs of a liberal Democratic administration and the need to obtain greater cooperation from its Democratic members.

As a result of this struggle, it became more apparent than before that controversy over aid to nonpublic schools was a major obstacle to enactment of general aid to education by Congress. Unfortunately, no solution to this problem resulted from this discovery. The principal organizations in the field of public education continued to ignore the needs of nonpublic schools, and it was not until after further fruitless struggles in Congress that they became aware of the impossibility of progress in this field without the consent of nonpublic school leaders.

The nature of the dispute over general aid and particularly the extent of Catholic opposition to the Taft bill did not become fully apparent during the Truman period because of bitter infighting in the House Committee on Education and Labor and the ambiguous position of its chairmen on this issue. Chairman Lesinski justified the committee's turn from general aid to aid for school construction in 1950 on grounds that all proposals for general aid involved unacceptable federal control of education. Barden, both before and after he became chairmen of the committee, charged that the Taft bill meant federal control of education. Attacks on "federal control" thus were made at this time by individuals and groups with diametrically opposed views on the Taft bill.

After Barden became chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor in 1950, he was reluctant to support the Truman Administration's two major objectives in the area under the committee's jurisdiction--repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act and aid to education. By his stand on aid for education, Barden also opposed the administration's efforts to make progress in the field of civil rights. The Truman Administration evidently found it easier and more profitable in the long run to blame the House Committee on Education and Labor for the impasse over general aid to education than to try to initiate alternatives capable of resolving the dispute over nonpublic schools.

By continuing to insist on general aid during its final two years in office, the administration could place the onus of responsibility for the lack of action on the House committee. The administration evidently felt that a lowering of its demand would not be reciprocated by the committee and that a stand on principle might help the administration's cause in the presidential election of 1952. The Truman Administration's failure to accept a substitute for general aid for current expenses after 1950 was also probably influenced by the attitude of the major educational organizations, all of which were reluctant to take construction aid as a substitute for current expense aid.

The cause for general aid for current expenses as embodied in the Taft bill was weakened after 1948 by indications that postwar prosperity had enabled the states to considerably increase their own expenditures for education. By 1948 much of the teacher shortage in many areas of the country had been relieved and salaries had risen substantially. By that time school construction needs had replaced teachers' salaries as the most urgent need in many areas. This, in part, explains the shift of Congressional attention away from general aid for current expenses to aid for school construction. Similarly, prevailing postwar prosperity removed the need for massive federal aid to higher education, as proposed by the President's Commission

on Higher Education, when the G. I. education program ended.

Furthermore, shortly after Truman left office, general aid to education as a means of improving the low educational level of southern Negroes was replaced by the conviction that racial segregation in education must be eliminated. Negro and civil rights groups had supported this position during the Truman presidency and it was finally endorsed by the United States Supreme Court in 1954. When this occurred the basic argument for general aid used by Senator Taft and the Truman Administration was no longer valid. The result was that significant changes in the idea of general aid to education took place during the 1950s. Patterns of political support for general aid also changed drastically, the most important being the defection of southern senators and representatives. A new and protracted effort to draft appropriate legislation and build up a consensus for it had to be undertaken all over again.

The Truman presidency is also significant in that, despite the controversy which raged within it, the House Committee on Education and Labor made progress toward dealing with national educational problems. The mere fact that the committee had for the first time extensively debated the issue of general aid to education, had come close to approving it, and had begun to consider alternatives, was in itself a

significant advance beyond its earlier narrow range of interest and activity. In the future, the House Committee on Education and Labor could no longer ignore national educational problems as it had in the past.

The initiative of the Committee on Education and Labor in the enactment of the impacted areas program and in moves to develop aid for school construction as a substitute for general aid laid the foundation for its assumption of leadership in Congress on educational matters in the 1950s. Despite the opposition of Chairman Barden to general aid to education, the orientation of the committee was gradually changed from conservative to liberal by the Democratic House leadership during the early 1950s. By 1955 the committee reported out a school construction aid measure despite Barden's opposition.[2] After 1955 not even religious controversy prevented the committee from regularly reporting out general aid to education measures.

The Truman presidency is also significant for the development of higher education legislation acceptable to both public and nonpublic institutions. The college housing loan program was the principal achievement in this field. Initiated almost entirely in Congress, this act set a precedent for indirect, specialized, and somewhat disguised aid which has been followed in all

---

[2] Congressional Quarterly, 1955, pp. 265-71.

subsequent programs of aid for higher education. It is equally significant that the proposals for sweeping federal aid to higher education proposed by the President's Commission on Higher Education were largely ignored by both the administration and the colleges and universities. Postwar prosperity also changed the purpose of the general scholarship program proposed by the Truman Administration and raised questions about the value and appropriateness of aid which would displace some of the students already enrolled in colleges and universities. Partly as a result of these doubts, as well as a desire to avoid controversies involved in comprehensive aid to education measures, the trend of federal aid to higher education during and after the Truman Administration was toward specialized and indirect aid. By forcing the issue on aid to higher education, however, the Truman Administration helped to clarify thought about the most appropriate form of federal aid in this field.

The Truman Administration's support for general aid attracted not only national attention but committed the Democratic party to support measures in this field. Efforts to obtain general aid for education continued during the Democratic-controlled Congresses of the Eisenhower presidency. A foundation was also laid for the commitment of the next Democratic administration, that of President John Kennedy, to federal aid for education, including both teachers' salaries and school construction.

Given the complexities and controversies involved in general aid for education, developments in the Truman Administration left many unanswered questions. Educational groups were still divided among themselves on the issues involved. The legacy of the Truman Administration did not include efforts by the administration to resolve the most important disputes in this area. The House Committee on Education and Labor was still deadlocked on the matter of general aid. These facts indicate that a generally acceptable program of broad federal aid to education was still a long way off. Despite the frustrations and failures at the time, a beginning had been made in what became a continuous though uneven effort to develop a consensus in this field.